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MMOZine

Issue 20 | April 2010

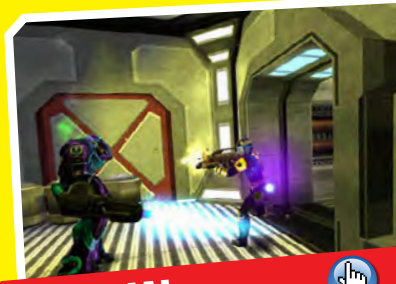
Free Magazine For MMO Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates

PREVIEW
EARTHRISE
Sci-fi goodness from the makers of the Fallout MMOG

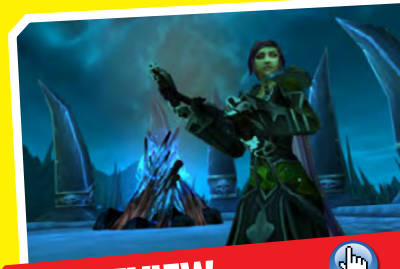
PREVIEW
LEGO UNIVERSE
A WORLD OF BRICKCRAFT IS OPENING UP!

TLBB + ALLODS ONLINE + TERA + CITY OF HEROES: GOING ROGUE

+ PREVIEWED
Runes of Magic: Chapter III
A visit to The Elder Kingdoms



+ ON TRIAL
Planetside
War has never been so much fun



+ RE-REVIEW
World of Warcraft 3.3.3
Get ready for the Cataclysm

Welcome to MMOZine

Hello, and welcome to another issue of MMOZine. As always, we've got the MMO world covered. For example, Allods Online is now with us but what was our opinion of it? Read on to find out.

But there's more. Check out our in-depth look at LEGO Universe, where you have total control to create practically anything you wish. Will it rekindle those halcyon childhood days making endless LEGO models?

And let's not forget Star Trek Online. Although it was horribly disappointing on release, we still thought we'd talk to the developers to see how they could make amends. The full story's in our exclusive interview. Enjoy the issue and we'll see you next time.

Richie Shoemaker, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

The MMOZine massive were told to go forth and multiplay, which they did…

MEGAN CLARK
Like all of us, Megan's praying for a better Star Trek adventure.

PAUL PRESLEY
Paul's dug the LEGO out of his cupboards in preparation…

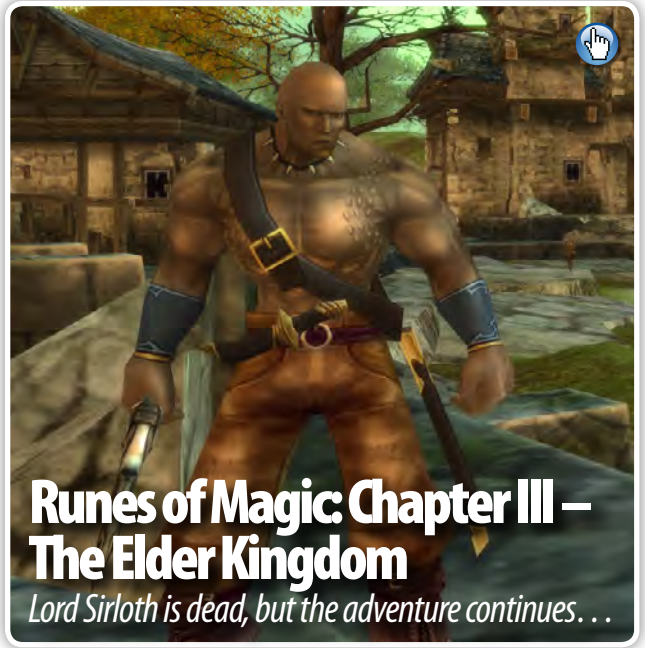
JIM ROSSIGNOL
Thinks the Gibberlings in Allods are 'cute'. We're worried.

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights…

LEGO UNIVERSE

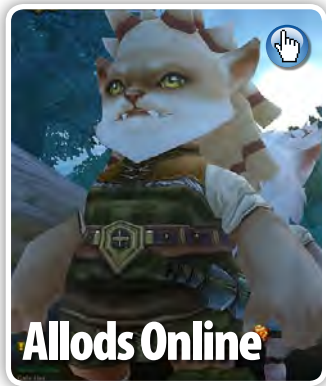
A genius idea, but will it work?



Runes of Magic: Chapter III – The Elder Kingdom

Lord Sirloth is dead, but the adventure continues…

Star Trek Online



Allods Online

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

- TERA: The Exiled Realm of Aborea
- City of Heroes: Going Rogue
- Alganon
- Champions Online
- EVE Online
- Tyrannis
- Football Manager Live
- Global Agenda
- Stargate Worlds
- LEGO Universe
- Earthrise
- Runes of Magic: Chapter III – The Elder Kingdom
- TLBB
- Star Trek Online
- Allods Online
- World of Warcraft 3.3.3
- Planetside

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We recommend you close and re-open the magazine and select "Play" when asked about the multimedia to enjoy the magazine as intended.

AION

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AION NCSOFT

FIRST LOOK

TERA: The Exiled Realm of Aborea

Descending from greatness

Publisher: En Masse Entertainment
Developer: Bluehole Studios
Heritage: Diablo, Lineage II
Link: www.tera-online.com
ETA: 2010

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of TERA: The Exiled Realm of Aborea

Saucy minx.

What's the story?

Looking very attractive and offering plenty of doe-eyed big sword action, you could be forgiven for thinking TERA was aiming to steal some of NCsoft's thunder after the relative success of Aion. With many of the Bluehole team originating from the Seoul-based MMOG powerhouse – including the Lead Designer and programmer from Lineage II – that theory seems born out. And we haven't even mentioned the judgement of a court in Seoul that suggests, perhaps unfairly, Bluehole may have been tricksy with NCsoft's source code.

What do we know?

Possible shady goings-on aside, TERA looks to set itself apart from Aion, and everything else with its focus on button-mash action, with native controller support negating an over-reliance on distracting timers and icons. "Player position, timing and aim all impact combat, creating a uniquely immersive 'explore and engage' experience that goes beyond traditional point-and-click-style MMO games," says the press release.

Ticking off graphics and the combat interface, features that the developers are keen to extol without going into specifics are the depth to which players will have a 'direct impact on the world, dictating the flow of the economy and manoeuvring through the political system of their server'. What this means is anyone's guess, although with everyone fighting for the Valkyon Federation, it would appear guilds will be jostling for position on some leader board rather than battling each other in the streets.

"Features the developers are keen to extol are the depth players have a direct impact on the world"

Developer DNA from Warcraft and Diablo has also been added to the mix.

Arborea is the world, and risotto is probably the national dish.

When do we get more?

US publisher En Masse have said that Beta testing will start later in the year, and we can expect more info to pour out when the industry congregates in LA in June.

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ALLODS ONLINE

VIDEO 1 VIDEO 2 VIDEO 3

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

ATTACK, DEFEND, LOOT OR PLUNDER! SET SAIL INTO THE ASTRAL WITH ALLODS ONLINE

"Allods Online has the potential to offer something really exciting in a genre that struggles to innovate"
(Videogamer.com, August 2009)

* Yep, you read that right. No subscriptions, ever!
Free to play MMORPG with player controlled space battleship in a fantasy space opera universe.
Allods Online features 2 factions, 28 classes, 1500 quests, PvP, PvE, raid, instance, boss monster, pets, guild, craft.
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gPotato ASTRUM NIVAL PC ONLINE

City of Heroes: Going Rogue

FIRST LOOK

Good to be bad, or bad to be good?

Publisher: NCsoft
Developer: Paragon Studios
Heritage: City of Heroes, City of Villains
Link: http://goingrogue.eu.cityofheroes.com
ETA: July

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of City of Heroes: Going Rogue

Someone is gonna get hurt.

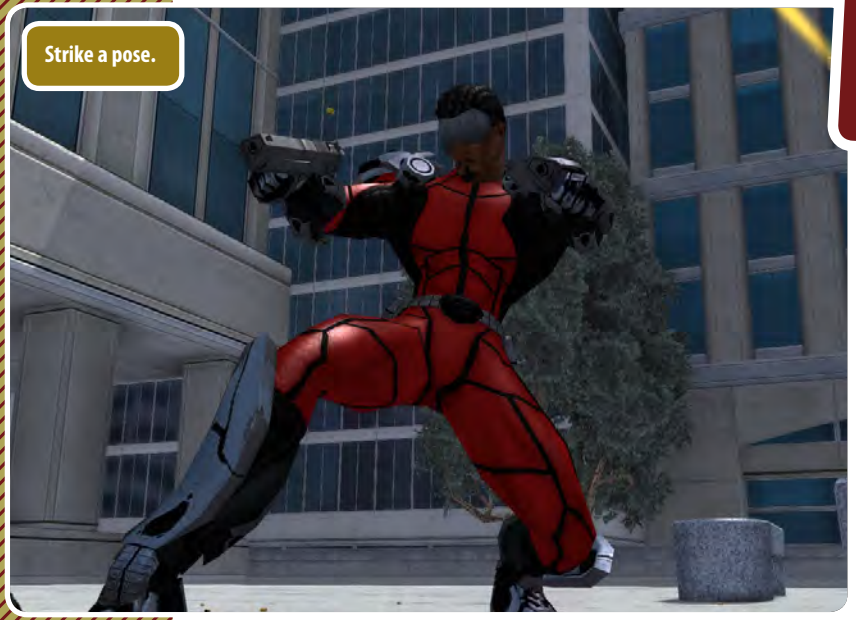
What's the story?

Going Rogue is all about how heroes and villains can work to shift their moral alignment away from full-on good or outright evil, towards the grey indistinct area where people who don't pretend to be superior and outrageously talented set their ethical boundaries. Or something like that.

The setting for this moral upheaval is the mirror universe of Praetoria, where human needs are catered for, but where the leaders are shadowy and seemingly corrupt. Players starting in this apparent utopia can choose to side with the loyalists or the Resistance – heroes and villains respectively – although as they progress the distinction between them will get murkier and murkier.

What do we know?

Established players won't miss out. Heroes can become Rogues, which will allow them access to the Rogue Isles where they can fight alongside Villains. The Villains similarly can become Vigilantes and team up with Heroes in Paragon City. This is only an intermediate phase however, as Heroes can completely turn Villain, and back again, should they see the error of their way. Or not.


Strike a pose.

"Pre-order customers gain access to two new powersets – dual pistols and demon summoning"

Dual pistol action in the face!

When do we get more?

Pre-order customers gain access to two new powersets – dual pistols and demon summoning, which will be augmented by two more by the time of release. Pre-ordering should also get you into closed Beta, so if you want to know more then first-hand experience is best. What we probably won't hear about for some time is City of Heroes 2, which NCsoft recently trademarked…

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7 UP

New MMOs and content updates to mark on your calendar with a BIG RED PEN!

Alganon

Developer: Quest Online | **ETA:** Out now

First released in December, Alganon has just been re-launched, going subscription-free in January and seen a change in leadership. Quest Online's President was sacked in March and replaced by the legendary Derek Smart. Expect Alganon to stay news-worthy for a while yet.

Stargate Worlds

Developer: Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment

After years of financial uncertainty, it's safe to say that after hearing that its troubled developer has been put out of its misery, Stargate Worlds is not going to go live anytime soon. Work on side-project Stargate: Resistance has shifted to Fresh Start Games, so at least Stargate lives on, in budget multiplayer shooty form.

EVE Online Tyrannis

Developer: CCP Games | **ETA:** May

Currently being enjoyed on EVE's test server is CCP's latest attempt to widen the appeal of their hardcore space MMOG, by allowing players to mine new resources from planets. Out of bounds since the very beginning, the planets are being primed as future battlegrounds for the Dust 514 console first-person shooter that is in development at the company's Shanghai studio.

Football Manager Live

Developer: Sports Interactive | **ETA:** Out now

Despite being behind one of the biggest PC game franchises of the last 15 years, Sports Interactive had a hard time transcribing Football Manager online. In a bid to shore up the game and rebuild community, the game has recently been relaunched at a lower price, fewer (and more populated) servers and with a new feature where footballers 'respawn' after retirement – meaning that players like Gazza can now live forever!

Fallen Earth

Developer: Icarus Studios | **ETA:** Out now

Having recently misplaced their Lead Designer to the makers of Marvel Universe Online, Icarus Studios have surged ahead seemingly oblivious to the loss. Nearing release is a highly anticipated iPhone app, but even more significant are recently revealed plans for the 1.5 patches and the introduction of Sector 4. Before that will be 1.4 and the introduction of 'blood sports' and CTF and Deathmatch game modes.

Champions Online

Developer: Cryptic Studios | **ETA:** Out now

With news that Star Trek Online has notched up a respectable but less-than Earth-shattering 100,000 subscribers, Cryptic have revealed that they have shelved plans of having their superhero MMOG running on any current generation consoles. It a recent forum post, Cryptic head Jack Emmert said: "100% of our focus is on making the current PC product the best it can be."

Global Agenda

Developer: Hi-Rez Studios | **ETA:** Out now

Close to release is the so-called 'Sandstorm' update, which will add specialist class tiers for player levels 30 to 50. Adding to the MMO credentials of the online shooter will be enhanced crafting options and all-new open zones for up to 50 players.

ON THE RADAR

- **2011** – Star Wars: The Old Republic
- **2010** – All-Points Bulletin
- **MAY** – Runes of Magic: Chapter III
- **MAY** – Mortal Online

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NCSOFT
LINEAGE II TEAM

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Publisher: N/A
Developer: NetDevil
Heritage: Jumpgate
Link: http://universe.lego.com
ETA: Summer 2010

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of LEGO Universe

LEGO Universe

Can the greatest toy of all time really be turned into an MMO?

"Leaping into LEGO Universe, you find yourself in a world populated by pirates, aliens, ninjas, rocketships, jetpacks, mad scientists and superheroes"

If there was ever a time when a toy truly made sense as a game, it was when LEGO Star Wars turned up on our screens. It brought the little plastic dudes to life, and melded silliness and charm with the greatest sci-fi legend of our time. It's this kind of neat characterisation that LEGO Universe is going to try and capture for the rest of the LEGO range. Leaping into LEGO Universe, you find yourself in a world populated by pirates, aliens, ninjas, rocketships, jetpacks, trains, buses, umbrellas, mad scientists, ambulances and superheroes – in fact, everything that the LEGO plastic toys have to offer. But there is badness here too. 'Dark imagination' means that players will have a struggle versus evil on their hands.

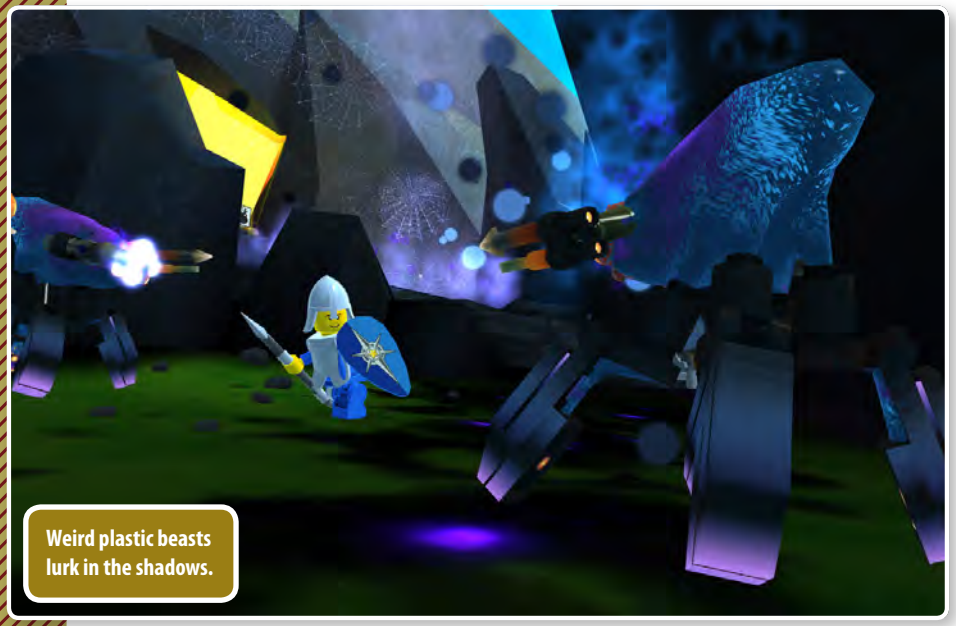
LEGO Universe is populated by 'minifigs', the standard LEGO toy characters, which are both the player-characters and the NPCs who will guide them on their way. They're beset by corrupted evil minifigs too, the ones who are trying to take over the world by force. The quest the players have on their hands is to return the source of imagination – stolen by a malevolent spider – to the hands of responsible folks, and make the world harmonious once again.

Get armed up and fight the Stromlings.

FIGHT THE POWER

Heavily customised players will be able to use their new-found powers to battle enemies in the world, such as these evil ninjas. Creating a game that is coherent with the plastic kits is essential for LEGO, and much of what you see you'll also be able to buy.

Lego puzzles are smashed and strewn across the landscapes.



Weird plastic beasts lurk in the shadows.

LEGO Universe cont.

The game is being developed by Colorado-based studio NetDevil, who have something of a patchy history. Their first game, Jumpgate, is a minor classic of multiplayer space combat, which is currently being remade for Codemasters as Jumpgate Evolution. Previous to that, and LEGO Universe, they worked on Auto Assault, a vehicular-combat MMO that was, quite simply, terrible. NetDevil claim to have learned their lesson from this disaster – which was closed down just a few months after launch – and to have benefited from the not-inconsiderable creative talent at LEGO. Nevertheless it seems that LEGO Universe will be sticking close to familiar models of fetch quests and mob-bashing.

Vive la difference

The big difference for LEGO Universe is that it's going to include puzzle-solving. Not exactly *building* in a Second Life or Minecraft sort of way, although there is some scope for importing LEGO models, but puzzle-solving in a manner similar to LEGO Star Wars. There are going to be smashed LEGO puzzles to fix strewn across the landscape too, and players will often have to fix them up if they want to progress. On particularly tough quests, players will need to band together to fix these things, and go about the LEGO world collecting the parts that they need.

There are three types of building in total… Quick building, in which you solve a puzzle by simply throwing together a set that you find in front of you. Then there's choice building, in which you move some bits around to figure out the build, and then custom building, in which you actually build stuff from pieces of LEGO. It's been confirmed

MINI-FIGURE IT OUT

Lego Universe isn't entirely unlike other MMOs…

FIXING PUZZLES | COMBAT | NOT ALONE

Fixing up puzzles, such as this bridge, will be essential to progressing through Lego Universe's many quests and building challenges.

LEGO Universe cont.

by LEGO that player's own creations will be able to be featured in the game world as items, and it seems that this will feature as part of the end game. How that works has not yet been fully revealed by NetDevil and LEGO, so it's tough to say how that is going to shape up. What we do know is that LEGO Universe is only going to use pieces that exist within the actual LEGO play materials. If it's something that exists in LEGO Universe, then you can build it in the real world, with actual LEGO. You're also going to be able to use web-based tools to make stuff on the LEGO site, and then import that across your LEGO identity into the game world. Ultimately, as we understand it, you'll be able to mail order the things you design as packets of plastic direct from LEGO – it's a game/reality crossover like nothing we've ever seen before.

Nevertheless, it seems something of a shame that LEGO Universe hasn't tried to fall a little further away from the traditional MMO tree, and perhaps lure in a new audience. As it stands, it seems that the game wants to cash in on the perception that World of Warcraft created a wider audience for MMOs. Is that really true? Or did World of Warcraft simply create a wider audience for World of Warcraft? It certainly seems that games which are operating on the same model are struggling to make a dent in the millions of subscribers that big bosses want to see. Perhaps if LEGO Universe had focused on the the purity of LEGO, or on the building, it might have been a welcome change.

It's you who'll decide, of course, and the launch shouldn't be too far off. The game is in closed Beta at the time of writing, and we can expect more waves of Beta – if not an entirely open test – before the game finally arrives with us at the end of the year.

"As we understand it, you'll be able to mail order the things you design as packets of plastic direct from LEGO"

Smashing enemies reveals plastic loot.

Expect to see some outlandish inventions as the game progresses.

MMOZine Verdict

Charming take on the Lego world, but not looking too original

HOW COMPLETE

70%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

70%

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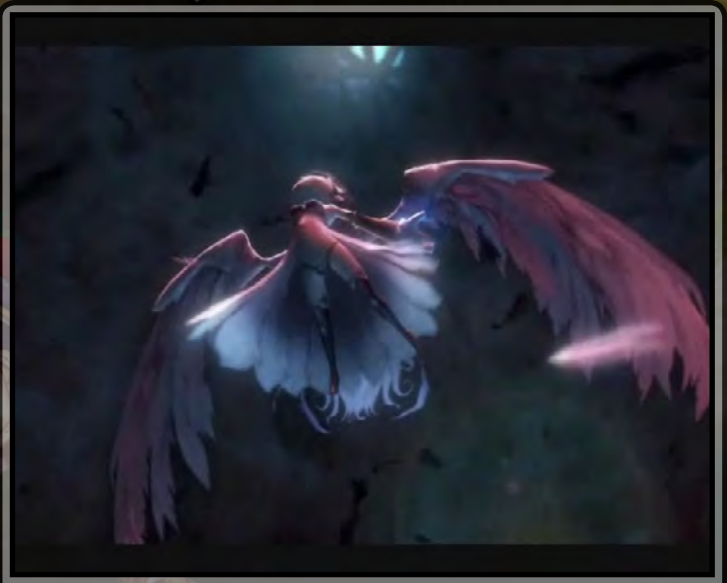

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

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Earthrise

An ambitious MMO to be sure, but can it deliver?

Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Masthead Studios
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.play-earthrise.com
ETA: Summer

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Earthrise

There are degrees of ambition, and the ambition of Bulgaria's Masthead Studios is steep indeed: to create a player-driven game world based on their own high-concept science fiction ideas, with a PvP focus and an emergent economy. They want to keep the solo players happy with an elaborate, monster-strewn world, and create an end game in which players will perpetually fight it out for control of the game's natural resources. It's fair to say that all of these are impressive notions, but can any of it really work?

Earthrise opts for a 'far future' fiction that writes the immortality of game characters into its world. Cloning in this dark future will allow people to live forever, but it's also the issue over which the game characters – who can align with one of the two major factions – are fighting.

An oppressive future government guarantees safety for the future of the human race, but they can also decide who lives and dies, so a rebellion kicks off. Needless to say, it's all rather post-apocalyptic, because all this this is taking place in the wake of World War Three. The world is warped and ruinous, and filled with things that could have been lifted from the most alien of science fiction worlds.

The design that Masthead are proposing seems to have learned some lessons from the

Bleak sci-fi scenes with men in robo-armour.

"Earthrise is filled with impressive notions, but can any of it really work?"

Suits can be heavily personalised by players.

ROBOT WARS

While Masthead have yet to reveal the vehicles they're including in Earthrise, this early art of the robots gives you an impression of the kind of scale they're aiming for. Players will be able to invest in this kind of tech as they become more powerful in the game world.

Earthrise boasts some incredibly moody environments.

Fabulous forests drip with visual detail.

Earthrise continued

likes of EVE Online, City of Heroes, and Ultima Online. While Earthrise is a third-person MMO along the lines of other games we've seen – Tabula Rasa, for instance – it's open in its skill structure. You won't be bound to a class, but instead be able to grow your character as you see fit – just as you do in EVE Online. Also similar to EVE, although executed differently, Earthrise has some benefits to not being online all the time. While your progression is all done during play, your characters can make money or recoup resources while offline. Masthead describe this as an advance version of the 'Rest' skill found on other games, in that when you are offline your character really is taking a break from the grind. This seems like a great model for gamers who can't put in regular hard graft to push their character forward continually, and still want a reward for paying that monthly subscription. Yes, Earthrise is intended to be subscription based.

Social behaviour

So anyway, there's also the social aspect of the game. Another thing that will no doubt be crucial to making Earthrise work as an MMO will be able to form up in a guild and fight for territory. You'll be able to attack each other throughout the free areas of the game, but will be prohibited from combat in the core security zones, where the two faction's governments will mete out punishment from aggression.

The PvP model is wide open too, allowing people to roam free as independent agents, or to band together to milk the resources of the land by capturing and holding territory. This will feed into an economy that is largely player-driven. As in EVE, much of the customisable kit that can

ROUGH GUIDE

It's time for a guided tour…

THE ARBORETUM **THE HATCHERY** **CASCADE MOUNTAINS**

Earthrise might be taking place after World War III, but this is no burned-up Fallout-style desert. The arboretum is a lush forest in which scientists have played with technology. The forest is home to terrifying quasi-sentient slave animals and carnivorous plants, just to get you started.

Earthrise continued

be fed into the world will have to be produced by the players themselves. This is going to unfold into the end game, with players getting heavily invested in both struggles for power and also struggle for economic powers, via the medium of crafting.

Gaming for one

All that isn't going to leave solo and PvE-focused players out in the cold, of course, because there's also going to be a long main quest arc wrapped around the core story of the game. Folks who want to just shoot stuff and be left alone will have plenty to get on with. Needless to say, future Earth is heavily populated with uglies and monsters which need to be culled, and many of the missions are going to be based around exploring the areas that these beasts inhabit, killing them and taking the loot back to base. Combat itself will be a mixture of your skills and your own abilities as a gamer, with the biggest factor being the mix of skills you choose to invest in for your particular avatar.

Ultimately, Earthrise seems to be an interesting mixture of the innovative and offbeat ideas in MMO gaming. There are nuances from EVE, from Ultima, and even from the likes of Global Agenda and PlanetSide. It's tough to imagine that Earthrise will achieve the heights of all its ambitions – not least because the road to success in science fiction MMOs is one littered with failed experiments, from Star Wars Galaxies to Tabula Rasa – but there's every reason to be excited simply by the direction it is heading. Maybe, just maybe, we'll start to get the kind of sophisticated MMOs we actually deserve. The closed Beta has already started taking sign-ups.

Some of the incidental architecture is breathtaking.

"Earthrise seems to be an interesting mixture of the innovative and offbeat ideas in MMO gaming"

Think Fallout, only with a couple of thousand years added on.

MMOZine Verdict

We're still waiting for the definitive sci-fi MMO but this probably won't be it

HOW COMPLETE

65%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

75%

Runes of Magic: Chapter III – The Elder Kingdom

Publisher: Frogster
Developer: Runewaker Entertainment
Heritage: Bounty Bay Online
Link: www.runesofmagic.com
ETA: May

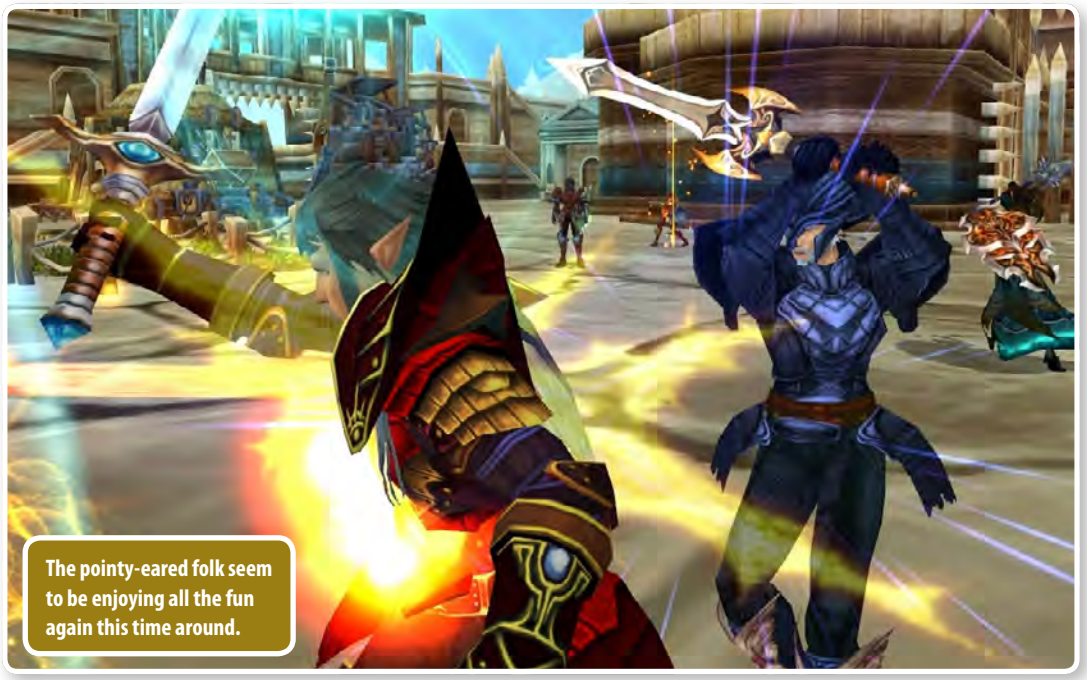
Triumph of the guild

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Runes of Magic: Chapter III

The defeat of the Demon Lord Sirloth concludes Chapter II: The Elven Prophecy, but you won't have to wait long for the introduction of Chapter III: The Elder Kingdoms. With the pre-launch on the horizon and the full expansion scheduled for May, there is enough new content coming to keep everyone occupied. There has been a lot of outcry on the forums from players about fixing current issues before introducing new content. Other players have been wondering what, if any, fixes will be included in the expansion for existing game issues. I'm afraid we don't have those answers for you but what we can tell you is that the expansion is feature-packed and includes a few upgrades that will revamp existing features.

While the majority of the new content is intended for player levels 55 and up, there are a few perks that

"This expansion is feature-packed and includes a few upgrades that will revamp existing features"



The pointy-eared folk seem to be enjoying all the fun again this time around.

TIE THE KNOT

Player marriages are being introduced with Chapter III. There is no minimum level required for marriage, but the marriage ceremony occurs at the end of a special event. Currently, only opposite gender couples can marry, but a future update should enable same-sex couples to tie the knot. While marriage benefits don't include shared living, the system isn't merely role-playing fluff. You and your partner will gain exclusive skills that become active in certain events, such as death.

These are not among the many planned new mounts, at least we hope not.

It's someone's turn to get a round in.

Runes of Magic cont.

lower-level characters will be able to participate in also.

As with most typical expansions, Chapter III features a level cap increase, a new continent, several new dungeons and new cities, but the shiny newness doesn't end there. According to Tony Tang, Runewalker Entertainment's VP of Business Development, "We are very focused on creating new epic quest lines. You may even say that the whole new continent has been designed for an epic quest. Besides that, we have prepared several new main quest lines. Players will participate in a truly epic story."

We're especially looking forward to exploring the new cities that are being introduced. The cities in RoM are graphically breathtaking, but they have always felt more like ghost towns than bustling hubs. Developers have noticed this and you will see an increase in the number of scripted NPCs in the cities of Dalanis, Avano and Aren to make them feel more alive.

Battlefields will be updated and a PvP ranking system will be introduced. There will also be a new battlefield – the Tyrefen Mountain Range. You will now be able to earn honor points in battlefields and spend them on various rewards in the honor shops. Developers promise that the rewards will now be well worth the effort spent to earn them.

"Battlefields will be updated and a PvP ranking system will be introduced"

The Guild vs Guild combat system is also planned for introduction. Developers are

Runes of Magic cont.

starting us off with nine different siege engines to use as we conquer Guild castles, but there are more planned for future updates. There are also new guild-specific quests to keep guild mates busy and active, and guilds will gain their own drilling grounds.

A new gear-based skill system is also being introduced. Once you complete an equipment set, you will gain a special skill from it. You'll be able to set up as many as five of these skills, beginning with two skill slots at level 50. The remaining three slots will be individually unlocked through events and future game updates. The skills have no limit and are class interchangeable, giving you the ability to customise your characters for special situations and enemies. Eventually, you'll have up to 10 skill sets that you can choose from to tweak your toon to your heart's desire.

Monster card system

The monster card system is also receiving an overhaul, making the cards more than simple trophies to be collected. Now there will be a chance that monsters will leave behind cards that provide bonuses to specific attribute points as well as the usual monster information. These attributes can be used to upgrade your characters stats, such as dexterity or stamina. Unneeded cards may be traded from player to player or offered for sale on the auction house.

The Chapter III expansion will also include features like two-person mounts, more upgrades for guild castles, new runes, tons of new quests and the introduction of instance difficulty levels. There's a lot to look forward to in the Elder Kingdoms expansion, but right now we can only hope that existing game issues will be addressed. Although progress in fixing existing problems is slow, Runes of Magic continues to improve and impress.

"There's a lot to look forward to in the Elder Kingdoms expansion"

The developers haven't quite decided on the numbers than can take part in each castle siege.

That's going to do some serious damage.

MMOZine Verdict

The relentless feature expansion continues, but will they be at the expense of fixes?

HOW COMPLETE

75%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

75%

TLBB

Huge game from big China

Publisher: ChangYou
Developer: ChangYou
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.alganon.com
ETA: April

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of TLBB

The creators of EVE Online recently celebrated there being more people subscribed to their game than live in its home country. It's an impressive feat, although lessened somewhat by the realisation that the entire population of Iceland would easily fit into a vacated London Borough. ChangYou, the Chinese makers of TLBB, a game that prefers to be known by dull acronym rather than the eminently more like-able Tian LÛng Ba B˘, will likely never make a similar claim about the size of its user base. Even so, it's hard not to be impressed by reports of the company garnering 70 million registered accounts and having their servers being populated by almost 900,000 at any one time. TLBB might not pull all those numbers, but being the third most popular MMORPG in China and the most successful in the ChangYou stable make it a game that's difficult to ignore

It's easy to see why TLBB is so well-liked in its native lands. Sure it's not the most hardware-intensive game, but it looks good enough with its vibrant colours and packed-in environments, especially when you consider the need for it to run on low-end systems. The real draw though is that the game proudly and unapologetically bases itself in Chinese myth and legend, with hardly any concessions made to Western fantasy stereotypes such as Elves or Trolls, which so often can seem out of place. As such, the TLBB world looks to be more cohesive and distinct than those of other Asian MMO games that we could mention.

That's not to suggest it's all Crouching Tiger. There's still

The so-called Herb Wars are an event we perhaps should have tried out.

The only way to travel.

TLBB continued

plenty of nonsense to be found, most notably in the pets system, which allows for fluffy bunnies and blue teddy bears wearing shades and gold chains to be captured, fed and summoned to help out in a fight. Having not read the original source material on which the game is based, we can't be certain the pets are not integral to the plot and action, but we suspect they're not.

A game with character

One of the main features that ChangYou are keen to promote are the nine faction-based character classes that become available at level 10. Based around Kung Fu combat styles as opposed to being those that more easily fit the standard templates of tank, damage-dealer or healer, the classes you can look forward to in TLBB range from the Shaolin, Assassin and Minstrel, to the more esoteric Royalist, Beggar or Taoist. Having only tried one – the Shaolin monk – we can only confirm that it isn't anything beyond being a combat brute, albeit an effective one. We would hope for better things from, say, the Lotus Order class for example.

In spite of the literary setting and focus on more earthly forms of combat, TLBB does not go out on a limb to be very different. It is in every sense an Asian MMOG, which means grind missions aplenty, a cramped interface, lo-fi graphics and the expectation that the game won't really open up until level 40. With constant events planned in-game, hopefully that journey will be made considerably more appealing.

Rather than come away jaded and frustrated by assembly line gameplay and a paper-thin world, TLBB is more than likeable. It's never going to achieve the same level of success as it currently enjoys back home, but that shouldn't stop it fostering a decent community of fans. It'll be interesting to see what ChangYou bring us next.

"The pet system allows for fluffy bunnies and blue teddy bears wearing shades and gold chains to be captured"

MMOZine Verdict

All the elements you expect in Asian MMOG, only they fit together rather well

HOW COMPLETE

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

65%

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Making it so-so

Reaching for the stars, with the Producer of the Star Trek MMO, Craig Zinkievich…

In the wake of the release of the first Star Trek MMOG, we caught up with Executive Producer, Craig Zinkievich to ask what went right, what didn't, and get some idea of where the game will be going as it heads out to where no other MMOG has gone before…

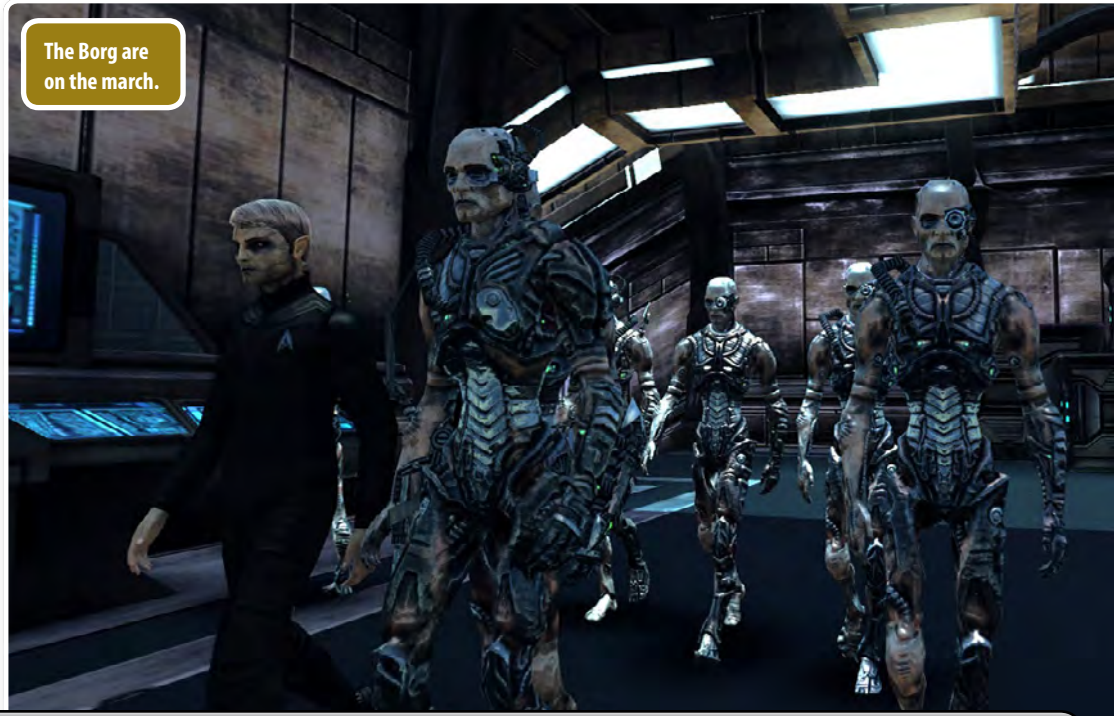
Star Trek Online seems to be one of the most divisive MMOGs yet released. The detractors either say the game isn't Star Trek enough, or there's not enough game. Which angle do you most have sympathy for?

One of the hard things for Star Trek is that people have their own idea of what Star Trek is. There are so many different TV shows, movies, and books, each with its own idea of what Star Trek is. For example, the TV series Next Generation is a lot different than the latest JJ Abrams movie. Both are Star Trek, but with different timelines, different stories, different direction and so on. So when people say our game isn't Star Trek enough, I think it's because they were expecting the game to be something more like their favourite show, movie, book or what they had envisioned in their head. It's not saying one is right and one is wrong, it's just different.

As a game developer you want to put everything in the game but you realise it's not possible. If we combined all of the TV series, books and movies and put them into one game trying to appeal to every Star Trek fan out there, it would have

"As a game developer you want to put everything in the game but you realise it's not possible"

Ship-to-ship combat is a definite highlight of the game.



The Borg are on the march.

Interview continued

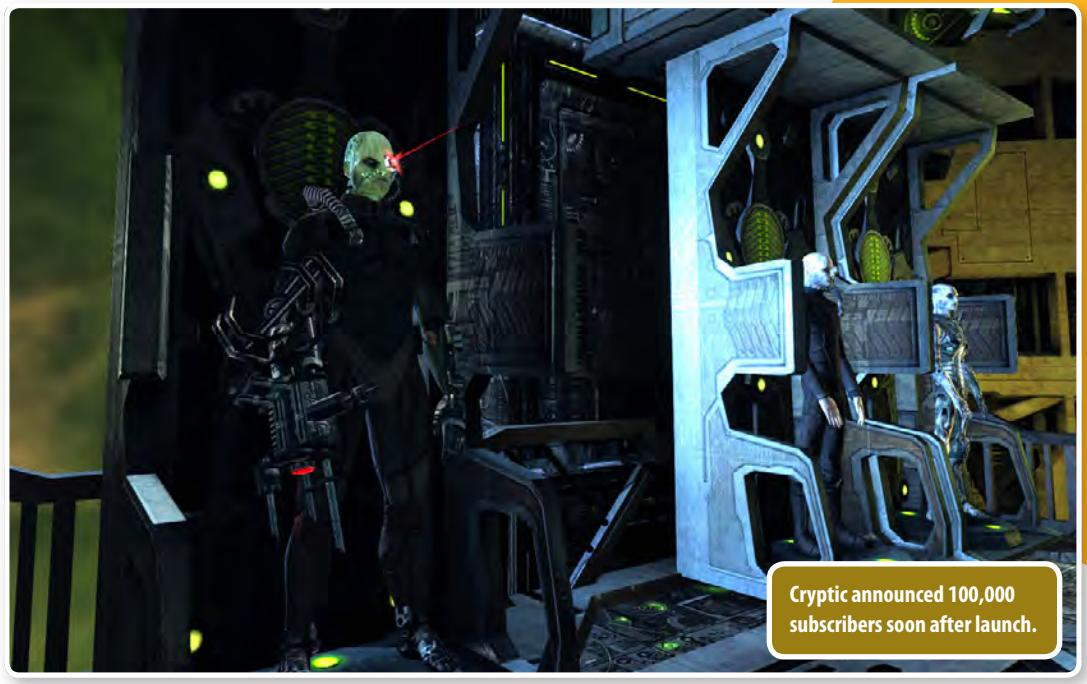
been a jumbled mess that in turn made no one happy. Instead, you have to try to look at what it is that's going to make a fun game and what elements of Star Trek are you looking for. We will always try to make the game feel more Trek, but like I said, what Star Trek is tends to vary from person to person.

As far as the 'not enough game' argument, we launched with roughly 80 hours of content available to Federation players. That's quite a bit of content, when you consider that the majority of Triple-A games now clock in under 20 hours. Obviously, we plan on adding more content and gameplay options as we go along, which is the best part of the game being an MMO. People want more, and we're in a great position to give them more.

> *"We plan on adding more content and gameplay options as we go along"*

Space combat = good. Ground combat = not so good. How will you be evolving the former and improving the latter?

We'll always be looking at ways to make every aspect of the game better. We understand that many people have enjoyed the space combat, while the ground combat hasn't been



Cryptic announced 100,000 subscribers soon after launch.

We love Star Trek, and we want to love Star Trek Online.

The original Star Trek was cancelled after Season Three. Hopefully this generation will air for a lot longer.

Interview continued

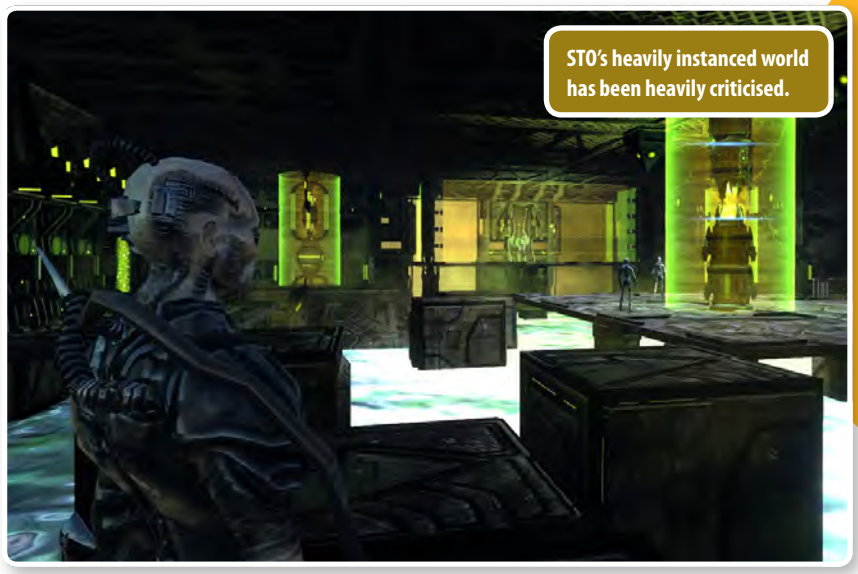
as enjoyable. So we are already talking about ways to improve it. We want both experiences to complement each other and be equally compelling. We feel we have the core gameplay there, and now it's just improving and making it better. But, like I said, this is not just for ground combat. We want to constantly be making improvements to the game as a whole.

For whatever faults the game has, it is remarkably engaging – especially so given its short development time. What have been the unique challenges of working within a very tightly controlled license agreement, to what must have been a very punishing schedule?

> *"You can Beta test a game for 10 years and still not know what you want after the game launches"*

Actually, CBS (the licensor) has been really great to work with. We've maintained an open dialogue with them throughout the game's development, and I think the Star Trek experience in the game is much better for it. They've got a great team over there that really cares about Star Trek, which made working with them exciting rather than an impediment to our development.

Season One is a welcome refit for many features.


STO's heavily instanced world has been heavily criticised.

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Cryptic Studios
Heritage: Champions Online, City of Heroes
Link: www.startrekonline.com
OUT NOW

If you had a list of things you would do differently if you were starting on STO again, based on what you know now, what would be third on that list?
Hindsight is always 20/20. There are a lot of things I could say we would do differently. You can Beta test a game for 10 years and still not know what you know after the game launches. At this point, the game is live and we're not really thinking about what we could've done. It's more about what we can do now. What can we add and improve to the game? These are more the questions we're focused on.

It's obvious that the game is popular, but by what yardstick are you judging the success of the game at the moment?
We have two metrics of success. The first and most important from an artistic standpoint is how well we've captured the essence of Star Trek, and how much fun the game is for people to play. Our second metric is how well the game has done financially – paying for the cost of development and turning profit and so on. What's nice is the two are related. An artistic success usually translates into financial success in this industry, and we're pretty happy with how successful we've been with the game to date.

What will be the criteria for success in 6-12 months?
I think our current criteria also expands to the future. We want to continually improve the game for our players and draw new players to the game with that improved gameplay. As long as we're bringing new fans to the game and making our current ones happy, I think we'll be successful for a long time. ●

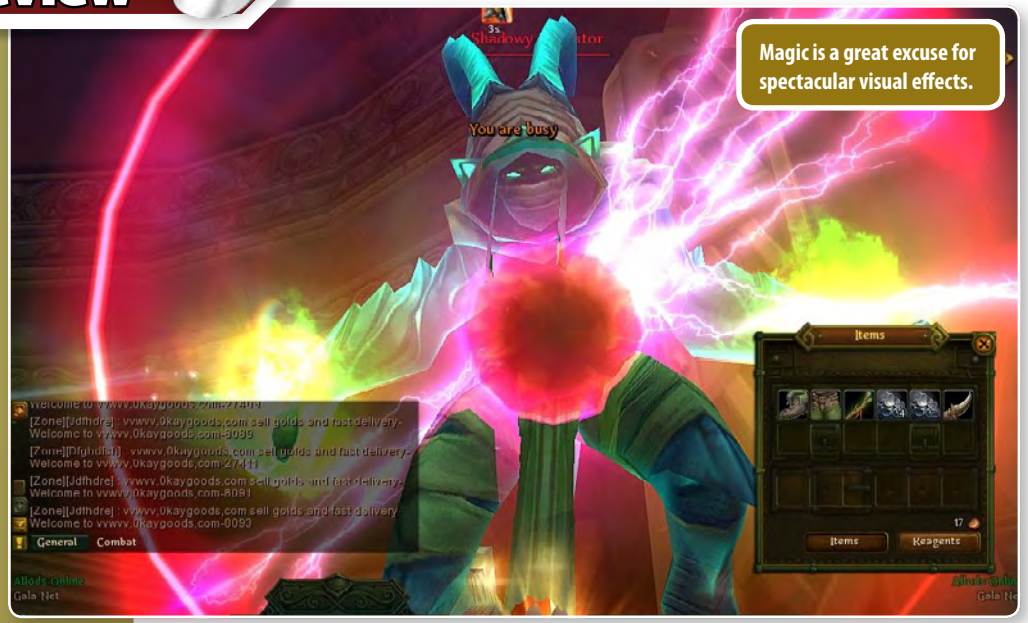
Allods Online

Publisher: GPotato
Developer: Astrum Nival
Heritage: Perfect World, Pirate King Online
Link: http://allods.gpotato.eu
OUT NOW

Will you get caught by the Gibberlings?

There's no getting around it… Allods Online looks a lot like World of Warcraft. To the untrained eye it might as well be the same game, because everything in there is in some way linked, from the style of icons to the tone of the landscape, from the low-spec cartoonishness of the game engine to the fonts used in mission texts and interface. It even plays much the same: the quests, the looting, the handing in the quests. Look closer though, and you'll see quite a different game. For one thing, Allods is free, but it's also a world away from Azeroth.

This project is one of the biggest ever videogames to come out of Russia. With a $12m budget, it's a high profile entry into the free-to-play market, and the Warcraft-like accessibility mean that it's a surefire lure for hundreds of thousands of budget-conscious MMO-goers. You can see the money at work in the production of the two opening adventures, each of which is filled with spectacular action, solid voice-acting and brilliantly conceived characters. Play further still and there's a world that has been beautifully crafted – two factions at war on the astral plane, beset by each other and by a psychedelic menagerie of demons. The characters too are wonderful, with Orcs and humans as per usual, but also Gibberlings – trios of cutesy magic Ewoks – and the Arisen,



Roll over screen for annotations

Allods Online continued

who are sinister Necron-like pseudo-humans. The artistic endeavour can be seen in the world at large too, with Spelljammer-like warships battling it our in a weird, nebulous plane of magic, and cities large and small, filled with peculiar denizens. The world of Allods is floating in that astral plane, and the warships that travel between the various floating islands make for the terrain of the endgame struggles. Crewing these ships, characters head out to take each other on in ship-versus-ship combat. Spectacular to see, at least. By level 35, players can even build their own galleons.

Day-to-day stuff

As you'd expect, the day-to-day activity in Allods is largely that of the mainstream MMOs: levelling up, customising your character, learning to craft, and so on. There are 12 stats for every character, as well as skills and a three-tier talent tree. Having humped past the tutorial and opening missions, you begin to see that Allods' inner workings are a bit lifeless. It's never very clear just how these are changing the game you play. Everything seems irrelevant aside from the level you are, and all the micromanagement seems to render much the same result.

Generally, combat seems weighted towards being easy on the PvE player – aside from instances – until the later game, which right now seems untested and a little uneven. Where it inevitably leads is the item shop, which enables the community to obtain some peculiar powers – such as a banner which *forces* players to unflag for PvP. This makes the later areas of the game unavoidably skewed towards player-driven combat. This seems like a strange decision, given the overall friendliness of Allods' front end. For a game which seems orchestrated to bring in casual players or bored WoW fans, there's something of a mystery as to why it should jump off into the realms of hardcore play come level 21. It seems to be intended to push people towards

THE IMPERIAL MARCH

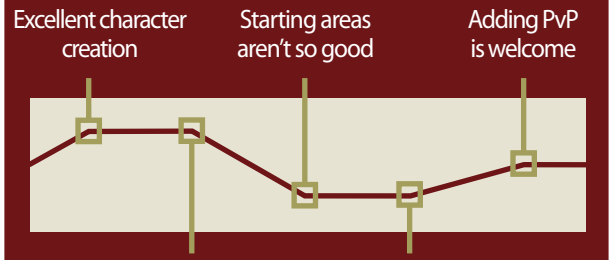
Opening scenes for Imperial characters lead to a dramatic warship battle on the astral plane. Can you get out alive?

ALONE | **REPEL INVADERS** | **ASTRAL DEMON**

You start off alone in your cabin. The basic tutorial takes you through movement and camera controls, before you step out.

Getting into the early public zones can be daunting.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life


Excellent character creation
Starting areas aren't so good
Adding PvP is welcome
Opening adventure is a gem
There's a long grind ahead of you…

Allods Online continued

spending on the micro-transaction aspect of the game, but we suspect it simply cause most to quit. That said, the game could change radically in the coming weeks – we can expect lots of development to tune it to a Western audience. Whatever the changes, it will have to make buying stuff from the shop more desirable. There have already been radical changes to game mechanics through the Beta, and more will come.

There will also need to be development to simply fill out the game world. Right now it leans so heavily on the grind once you're into the game proper, that it's hard not to be put off. The way dungeons are currently structured is uninviting too. It's possible, for example, to get through a dungeon and not be able to take out a boss, and – even for a seriously buff party – dungeons can be an interminable slog.

So there's a sum to be worked through here; a free, beautiful game world balanced against a game model that simply isn't all that interesting. The clothes are beautiful, but the sense of progress in the numbers is empty. Does it matter when you're not paying anything? Perhaps not, but you're still paying with time. The truth is that there *are* better games, even if you end up spending money on them. ●

MMOZine Verdict

One of the best things from Russian since Tetris

- ✓ Free to play, and loads of content
- ✓ Brilliant visual ideas and playful quests
- ✗ Goes a bit wonky in the end game

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time…

The Allods art team have created as much spectacular scenery as the game can hold.

Neat little touches abound, like being able to hold an uncast fireball burning in your hand.

The Imperial Police look a little intimidating, to be honest. And they don't help with directions.

Yeah, it's basically as cute as you want to make it. These little guys are everywhere in Allods.

The Imperial city is so big that it dominates the entire start of the game for Imperial characters.

Publisher:
Blizzard Entertainment
Developer:
Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Starcraft, Diablo II, Warcraft III
Link: www.wow-europe.com
OUT NOW

World of Warcraft 3.3.3

The calm before the Cataclysm

The Lich King is dead, the threat to Azeroth from the frozen north has passed and the calm has once again descended. Don't believe us? Just check out that shiny new fountain in Dalaran to view Arthas' demise. Then go run some low level dungeons and peace before the storm that is the Cataclysm. Yes we know it's coming but for our virtual counterparts, it's business as usual all across Azeroth.

While there are still at least two more major 'minor content patches' in the form of the Ruby Sanctum and the retaking of the Gnome capital of Gnomeregan and the Echo Isles, one belonging to the outcast Trolls. The latter is believed to be a part of the much-awaited and inevitable Cataclysm prologue. For now though, Blizzard is focusing on tweaking the game and therefore paving the way for the next expansion.

Those looking for new raid content or lore are going to be a little bit disappointed. This patch – which is lacking even a name and known just as 3.3.3 – is more about perfecting gameplay, fixing the classes and expanding the ever popular Dungeon Finder. While this might sound a little bit annoying, this continued improvisation is vital to the game and serves as a harbinger for all the delicious content yet to come.

"Those looking for new raid content or lore are going to be a little bit disappointed"

For example, the next time you find yourself in Ironforge or Orgrimmar, take a closer look at High Tinker Gelbin Mekkatorque and Vol'jin. In anticipation of their roles in the final content patch of Wrath of the Lich King:

Just visit one of the PvP NPCs to redeem your marks.
Alliance Brigadier General
Concerted Efforts
Redeem Battleground Marks for Honor.
Goodbye

World of Warcraft cont.

Operation: Gnomeregan and Liberation of the Echo Isles, both have been given a new look – just as Jaina Proudmore and Sylvanas did for The Fall of the Lich King. But this decision to revamp these soon to be key characters a little early is a small reminder that yes, Deathwing is returning – and soon.

Honor by any other name

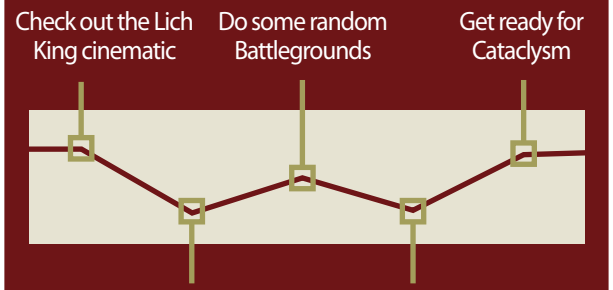
The really big changes are PvP and related to the Dungeon Finder, the new system introduced with The Fall of the Lich King, which allows you to play roulette with your dungeon choices and also allow for easy (and surprisingly civil) pugs. As the system has been such a success, it is now being rolled out so you can use the Dungeon Finder to enter a random Battleground – the only trick is you have to be a level 80 for it to work.

Another neat change involves PvP gear and mounts. Previously, if you wanted to buy one of those oh-so-sweet PvP mounts or certain shiny items of gear, you not only had to grind honor, you also had to do certain battlegrounds. Not any more! Marks for serving in BGs have been made redundant. You also get even more honor for slaughtering the other side and, all in all, it's a much easier system.

Of course, these are not the only changes. There are the usual class tweaks, but now we are properly in-between expansions, the devs at Blizzard have taken the time to tidy up the game and world before Deathwing comes along and rips Azeroth apart. While not the most exciting of patches, 3.3.3 is one of the most needed as it heralds the end, even if that end won't come until much later this year. ●

Honor is the name of the game, with plenty to be earned.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life


Check out the Lich King cinematic
Do some random Battlegrounds
Get ready for Cataclysm
Bored now. What else has changed?
Get slaughtered in random Battlegrounds

BATTLEGROUND RUSSIAN ROULETTE

The Battlegrounds have long been a bone of contention in WoW. Some people love em, other's hate them. With the arrival of Wintergrasp, many of the older BGs became neglected and often faction-biased, the Dungeon Finder attempts to rectify this by randomly teleporting players but also by offering rewards (just as the Dungeon Finder does for dungeons) for every random one you enter. And, for now, the lure of honor seem to be working even if, on most servers, the Horde continue to trounce the Alliance.

Dedication of Honor
Dedicated to those that fell to the Scourge during the war in the frozen wastes.
See the fall of the Lich King.
Goodbye
Healingice has gone offline.
The Lich King is dead and you can witness his demise.

MMOZine Verdict

World of Warcraft 3.3.3 has something for everyone

- ✓ Battleground Finder
- ✓ PvP mounts for all
- ✗ No new raid/lore content

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PLAY AGAIN

Around a world in 14 days*

(*or however long the trail period lasts)

Part 8: PlanetSide

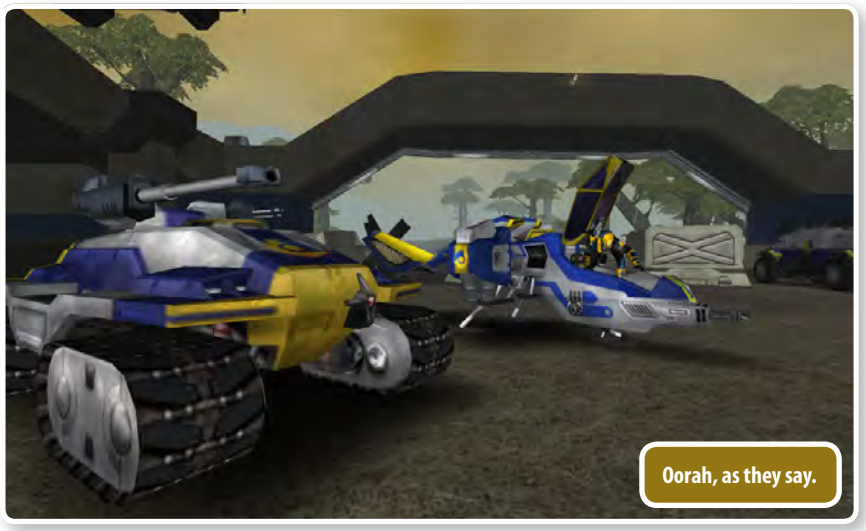
Putting up a spirited defence.

Richie Shoemaker finds the troops still bravely soldiering on…

May 2003 was a significant month for the world of online gaming, for it saw the release of two of the most innovative and ambitious multiplayer games ever to be released. One was of course PlanetSide, Sony's bid to expand the online shooter beyond the narrow confines of Quake and Unreal. The other newcomer was EVE Online, a curiously complex sci-fi attempt to break out of similarly constrictive server limitations.

Given the universal and persistent popularity of shooters and how well PlanetSide managed to fulfil its objectives early on, and how launch-era EVE promised more than it could actually deliver, it will likely baffle gaming historians to look at both games today and how their fortunes have fared since that fateful month in which Bush declared 'Mission Accomplished' in Iraq. EVE does not look like a game coasting through middle age, while PlanetSide looks mired in antiquity.

Without going into what did and what didn't go wrong for PlanetSide, in spite of how things have turned out, it remains today a game almost without equal. There still isn't a game that comes anywhere close to offering the scale and immediacy



Oorah, as they say.

Catching up with basic training.

Blasted BFRs!

Character creation is basic, which is good if you want to get straight to the action.

Replay continued

of PlanetSide's first-person conflict, although it should be pointed out that the one remaining server is hardly a bustling boot camp of seething conflict. In fact, Auraxis seems almost pleasant and sedate compared to how it once was.

As someone who's not been back to Auraxis since Aftershock and the release into the wild of mechs (or Battle Frame Robots, as they are supposed to be known), which for many players were the final nail in the game's coffin, it's heartening to see a faithful hardcore of players still keeping the frontlines in flux. The BFRs remain just as prominent as I remember, which still causes pangs of regret that they were ever introduced. It's a shame, because one of my most treasured memories as a gamer was being part of combined arms incursions into Barney territory, either inside a massive Galaxy dropship, or snaking through swamps and forests in a convoy lead by a Sunderer. Such tactics seemed to go by the wayside when BFRs started leaping about the place.

If I'm coming across as overly nostalgic, that's because in a game where being part of a squad is mandatory, knowing you're not going to be sticking around means limiting yourself to lone wolf operations, which in this game aren't much fun.

In spite of the brave new world it attempted to make popular, set as it is across vast environments rich with tactics, PlanetSide feels like a game that is coasting towards retirement. It's hard to imagine it surviving beyond the next two years, certainly beyond the so-called PlanetSide Next. How ironic too that it could be CCP that provide the next evolutionary step for massively-multiplayer shooters with their planned integration of EVE and Dust 514.

All is not quiet on this front.

In MMOZine Issue 21

RUNES OF MAGIC:
CHAPTER III – THE ELDER KINGDOMS

The second expansion for our favourite free-to-play MMORPG will be ready for launch, and we'll be giving you our verdict next issue. Don't miss it!

PLUS!

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MMOZine Issue 21

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